

FLODDEN FIELD

ALFRED AUSTIN 

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A TRAGEDY

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

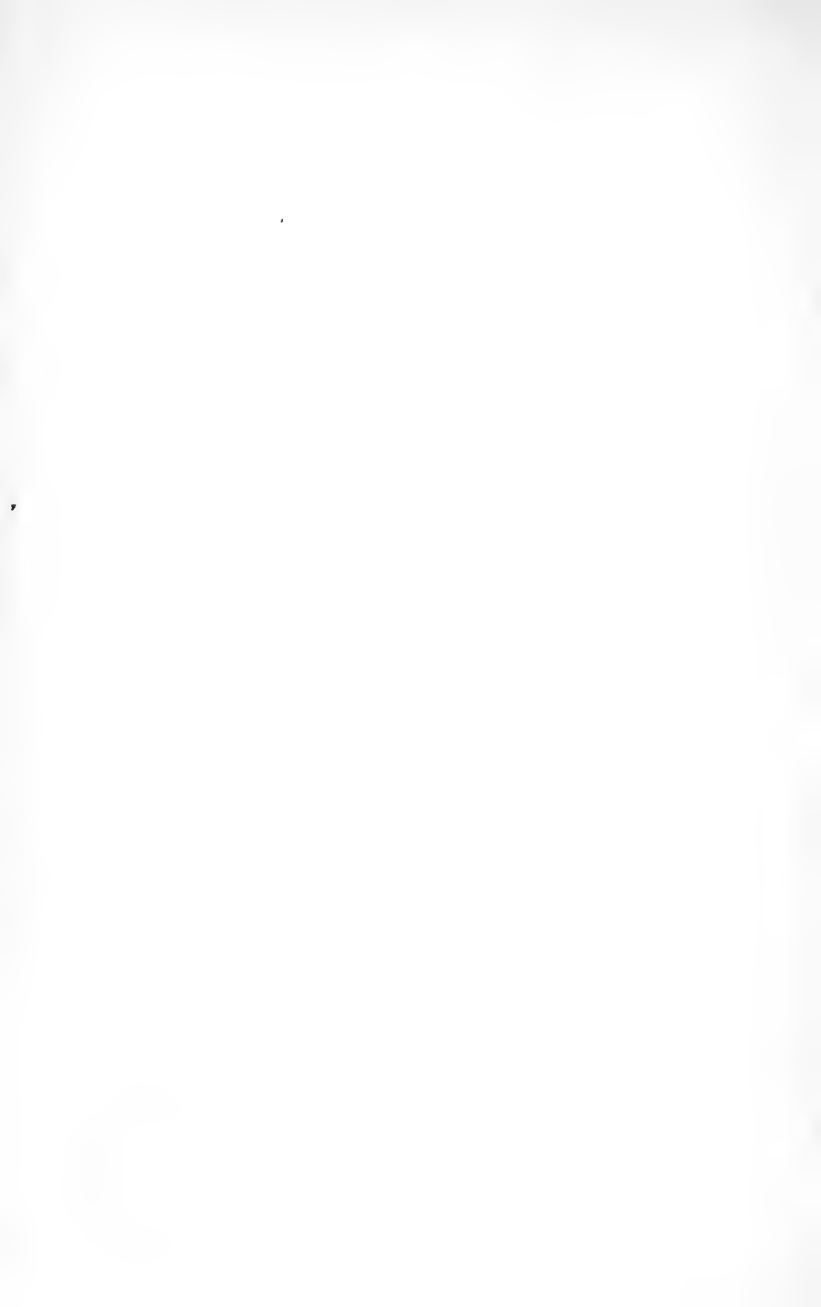
POET LAUREATE

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PRELUDE

[Midnight. A broad parapet, outside the Royal Palace of Linlithgow, on to which JAMES emerges, while MUSIC is being played, and the sound of gay laughter is heard, within. At the open windows, the faces of LADIES at the King's Court appear and disappear.]

JAMES

Good night, fair ladies all ! Truce to your charms !

Warm dreams, sound sleep ! But, as you know,
in France

They say the silent recollected Night

Brings counsel sage, and I have need of it.

So let the music of your laughter and

Soft-shading eyelids see you to your beds.

B

But, as you go, be measured in your mirth ;
Wake not the Queen ! Good night ! Good night !
Good night !

[He walks slowly along the parapet. Shortly, as he
turns, he beholds a veiled APPARITION.]

Who mayst thou be ?

APPARITION

The Wisdom of the Night,
Whom you invoked ! Go not to war with Eng-
land !

Or if the hotness of your blood demand
That sanguinary ordeal, beware,
Beware of woman's glamour, woman's wiles !

JAMES

Now I'll be sworn that this is merely one
Of England's crafty emissaries, or

Some frolic beauty of my Court, dispatched
To play upon my fancy some fresh trick.
Well, if the first, my sword shall probe the riddle ;
And, if the second, she the forfeit pay
Of such nocturnal visitants.

[He draws his sword, and prepares to thrust at the APPARITION. It stalks slowly towards him, walks upon his sword point, against him, through him, and vanishes.]

Gone !

[He turns to see if it be behind, but there is no one, and the last lights in the Castle are extinguished.]

Gone !

ACT I

SCENE :—Gallery at Ford Castle

(SENESCHAL. MARGERY)

[MARGERY arranging fresh-plucked roses in the Gallery.

SENESCHAL gazing out of the window in the raised embrasure.]

MARGERY

Roses are in September yet more sweet
Than in the lavish loveliness of June,
And by us are more fondly cherish'd ;
Loved guests that are about to go away
When we would have them linger ; fading friends,
Our love for whom we do but half surmise
Until the grave imperiously claims
They be to it surrendered. My lady loves

Autumnal flowers, albeit herself she be
Still in the heyday of her Summer beauty,
And these for her were gathered. There ! And
there !

[Mounting the steps of the embrasure.]

Oh ! will the fight be fought as near as that ?
I see the armies plain, the camps astir !
I almost hear their voices !

SENESCHAL

Goodly sight,
Bravest of earthly shows ! It makes one fancy
Oneself a boy again, to look on it ;
Thaws the congealing blood, loosens stiff joints,
And feeds afresh the flickering flame of life.
When I was young, the sword was rarely sheathed,
The spears were never stacked ! War, always war,
Along the joyous Border !

MARGERY

Death too, death,
Ever in ambush !

SENESCHAL

Have we not all to die ?
I have known men who, lingering at fourscore,
Had never lived an hour, and youths that died
In the full summer sunshine of their days,
But they had flowered continuously through
The season of the hawthorn and the rose,
And Autumn never seared their manly beauty,
Nor Winter piled its snow upon their hearts.
They lived still fighting—fighting still they died.
There's nothing like it, though perchance you deem
That Love is sweeter.

MARGERY

So in truth I do,
Or, rather, think I should, did I but know it.

SENESCHAL

I warrant me you know it well, and now
Nature from you her secret not withholds,
Though 'tis more maidenly you should not own it.
Viewing me now, mere winter of a man,
You well may find it full as hard to think
I ever loved as that I ever fought.
Yet, Margery, on my soul, I have done both,
And War was sweeter even than was Love,
Though Love itself's a sort of warfare too,
Wherein the boldest wins.

MARGERY

Is that quite so?

I have been told, in love the weakest wins,
The weakest, and the gentlest.

SENESCHAL

Think so, then.

But the sound sleep under the silent stars,
The clamour, the bright bustle of the dawn,
The doubt, the dangers, the delights of war—
Gone, all of them gone, for me at least, who now
Will never know them more ! Of recent years,
Our English Henry, Seventh of the name,
Though grandson of gay Hal of Agincourt,
Was all for peace with Scotland, and thereto
Married his daughter Margaret to King James.
But now that a young Harry, warm in blood,
And proud and mettlesome as James himself,
Who were to-day at Flodden but he is

Afoot for fame in battle-fields of France,
Sits on the English throne, these gamesome kings,
Like two-year cockerels with their steel spurs on,
Claw at each other.

MARGERY

But the pretext, what?
There must be some pretence.

SENESCHAL

A woman, Margery,
As it has ever been since Troy Town fell.
Leastways, a woman's jewels, Margaret's,
Her brother will not yield until some wrong,
In which Sir William Heron was mixed up
And captive seized, be righted by King James.

MARGERY

When think you that the battle will be fought?

SENESCHAL (*after stiffly ascending and descending
the steps of the large embrasure*)

See ! here comes one more like to know than I.

MARGERY

Who may that be ?

SENESCHAL

One we all know right well,
The warmest yeoman on the lands of Ford,
Young Donald Grey, the Captain of the Troop,
And armed as though for martial purposes.

[Enter DONALD]

DONALD

Homage to Mistress Margery, and to you,
All the respect youth pays to worth and age.

SENESCHAL

What tidings, Donald ?

DONALD

Right brave ones, sir. All those I notified,
Muster in force, in honest clansmen gear,
Accoutred in their best, a hundred strong,
Stripling and adult, very flower of Ford.

[Exit SENESCHAL.]

MARGERV

Shall I not tell my lady you are here?

DONALD

I pray you, of your graciousness. Yet stay
One moment, if you will. There was a word,
A little word, I fain would say to you.
Forgive me if I seem to have forgotten it.

MARGERV

Then will I unto Lady Heron ; meanwhile
It may come back to you.

DONALD

Nay, go not yet !

Yes, this it was : a bold yet halting word,
The oldest, freshest, biggest in the world,
That chokes the broadest-chested man alive.
I love you, Margery ! Since that still night
When we 'chance met and wandered 'neath the stars,
That seemed to shine in Heaven but with your eyes,
And the husht woodlands listening to your voice,
I hear no other name, but only yours.
The very faintest breath that stirs the leaves
Still whispers " Margery ! Margery ! " Every stream
That sings its way adown to Till or Tweed
Trebles and carols " Margery ! " Can it be
That Nature thuswise would seduce my ears,
But to bewray my heart ? Tell me it doth not !

MARGERY

How can I know? Yet, since that star-crowned night,
When your voice trembled, and my soul replied,
I long for something, something! Is it you?

DONALD

It is, or, if 'tis not, it needs must be.
Let us put it to the test, and you will learn.

[Embraces her.]

MARGERY

Oh, 'tis too sudden! And the fight! the fight!—
May be you go to death, and then the life
Of her whom thus you have betrothed for yours,
Would have to wear unwedded widowhood.

DONALD

Your love will charm aside the threat of death,
And see me safely through the riskiest fray.

Love makes a man, who is verily a man,
Active in peace and valorous in war,
Too confidently knit to fail or fall.
Make me yet stronger !

MARGERY

But you must not fall,
Nor court exceeding danger overmuch.

DONALD

Yea, that I must, and shall. For Love deprives
Danger of danger, frightens fear away.
And I would win you, having helped to win
Victory for Surrey and the English Cause.
Tears ! Are these tears ?

MARGERY

'Tis but an April shower,
That brings the martlet to the cottage eave,

Blade to the grass, and leaf unto the bough,
And wakens every note of pairing joy
In garth and brake.

DONALD

Be mine, then, like the sun,
To smile, and kiss the glittering drops away !
See ! Harvest ripens in the Autumn fields,
In this still rounding world. But young Love is
A Springtime in itself, and in my heart
I feel its blossoms, O, too long kept back,
Unfolding fearlessly.

MARGERY

Yet let us, Donald,
Prolong their loitering, lest some Summer
Shorten Love's sweetest season !

DONALD

But remember

I have a nest all ready for you, dear,
Only awaiting to be warmed by you,
When I will tend on you, and hourly bring
All that Love needs for brooding happiness.

MARGERV

Forbear ! Forbear ! or tears will rain afresh !
What do men say of Surrey ?

DONALD

That he needs

Like centuried oak, an amplitude of space
To manifest his greatness. That he hath
The stoutest heart and strongest will alive,

C

And under him to serve the entrance is
To honour and distinction.

MARGERY

Yes! and you
Are Head and Captain of the Troop of Ford.

DONALD

Yes, by their generous choice, so must I hence
Unwillingly, and but at Duty's call,
To muster them within the Castle Court,
Where, ere they march, they trust that Lady Heron,
Her lord away, will speed them to the fight.

MARGERY

As so she will, I doubt not. I, meanwhile,
Her grateful ward, will sue to her and beg
Her sanction to our——

DONALD

Love and Marriage-bond.

But, ere we part, troth we our love anew !

[They embrace. Exit DONALD, MARGERY accompanying him to the door, and, as she closes it, and turns,

Enter LADY HERON.]

LADY HERON

Round but the hour, and then He will be here !

MARGERY

He? Who? The King?

LADY HERON

The King ! My more than King,

My towering Warrior, Hero, Conqueror, Man,

My birthright-sceptred Surrey ! He will come,

Afresh red-hot from battle to my arms,

Martial voluptuary, his victor blade
Crimsoned with routed blood up to the hilt,
His face ablaze with slaughter, and his breast,
Like hammer upon anvil, beat on mine
In Love's own furnace.

MARGERY

Oh, hush, hush !
Or, though I love you gratefully, as should
The orphan you have mothered from her birth,
You can I serve no more, for those are words
Neither for you to utter, nor me to hear.

LADY HERON

Then hide within a nunnery, though even there
I have heard the vestal flame will overburn,
Fluttered by Nature, the incendiary,

And underneath the wimple woman's heart
Betray its straight descent from Lucifer.

MARGERV

How wildly you do ravin among words,
Till I can scarcely follow or understand,
Save that I somehow feel that they are wicked,
And God will punish their fierce wantonness !

LADY HERON

Dear little maiden, how Spring-fresh you are,
When you unbosom what I would not have—
And yet perchance I would !

MARGERV

I'll give you all,
The little that it is, that I do own,
So you do want it.

LADY HERON

Ah ! too late ! too late !

When once the dew hath vanished from the grass,
Or the frail petals fallen from the flower,
Who can bring back the freshness of the dawn,
Or who refold the rose ?

MARGERY

I love you best

When you discourse like that. And, lady dear,
Be sure of this : through life's unsureness, He,
Who made us all in innocency, can
Remake us, if we would !

LADY HERON

Consoling faith !

Could we but have it for the asking ! But—
What was I saying ?

MARGERY

That Surrey will be here
Ere rounds the clock. Why then dispatch to James
A special, swift, and trusty messenger,
Bidding him also come? Want you them both?

LADY HERON

Yes, I want both, because I want but one,
For James's presence 'chance may profit Surrey,
Haply, myself as well.

MARGERY

Deem you that fair?

LADY HERON

Have you ne'er heard that all is fair in war,
As 'tis in love, and I have both in hand.
Can I but keep James dallying from the field,

Or fool him late for the fight, then Surrey's plans,
Then Surrey's sword, will be the better for 't,
And Surrey's love more closely drawn to me.

MARGERY

That is a snare that never could I set.

LADY HERON

A snare ! The fatuous ensnare themselves,
And any other bait would serve as well
For such gross feeding. But, remember, child,
To lock your lips on that, which it was rash
To think aloud, and so forget it straight.

MARGERY

Nay, you may trust me when I most do blame,
And, if you are betrayed, it is yourself

Will be the traitress to your treachery,
As so, dear lady, it doth seem to me.

LADY HERON

Seems ! Seems ! What matters it, forsooth, what
seems ?

In love one has to make what is not, seem,
And that which seems, a something different.

MARGERY

But if the King and Surrey haply meet
Here, and at such an hour ?

LADY HERON

Babe ! One can take
Precaution against such mischance ; and none,
Were he crowned King and Emperor of the globe,
Should on my presence break, or be announced,

Were I alone with Surrey.

[Looks at the clock.]

Oh, how slow !

An hour is longer than I thought, its tick,
Like to a sickly and enfeebled pulse,
Losingly laggard ! Hie you, Margery,
Hie to the topmost spiral of the Tower,
The one that faces Flodden, and see ! see !
If he be coming.

MARGERY

Straightway ! But I first
Would to you make a loving little prayer.

LADY HERON

And that ?

MARGERY

It is to crave your tender leave

To keep a vow perhaps too rashly given
To one too worthy to refuse it him.

LADY HERON

Who is it that you love?

MARGERV

Young Donald Grey

Tells me 'tis he, and I have trust in him,
And so believe him.

LADY HERON

Thrice enviable maiden !

Lost in the mystery of a virgin love,
Loving you know not what, you scarce know whom,
Save that it is not self nor worldliness,
Nor anything that's base and surfeiting.

MARGERV

And thus I still shall dwell upon your lands,
And so be near you always. Now I go,
To do your bidding.

LADY HERON

Nay, but wait awhile !

He never yet was here afront his time,
Nor ever in the rear of it overmuch.
And I still love to long for him a little ;
It sharpens meeting. Therefore, stay you here,
And sing to me some simple little song
To soften aspiration, till I float
On that delicious vacancy that rocks
'Twixt dreaming and awaking.

MARGERV

What shall I sing?

Say, shall it be the lovelorn melody
That pleased you yesterday, both air and words
Made by King James?

LADY HERON

By him—by any one—
What matters it by whom? For, were they writ
By the seraphic choristers of Heaven,
I still should think of Surrey.

MARGERV

Always Surrey!

Doth James then please no more?

LADY HERON

He never pleased.

But homage pleases from all slaves alike,
Kings most of all; and homage that is love

Claims some return from grateful loyalty.
But his? He hath a score of roaming fancies,
And one of twenty would I never be.
Thus his feigned homage, wide distributed,
Both pleaseth and displeaseth. Oh, how base,
Fatuous, and false, women and men alike
In the disport and hot pursuit of love,
Thus wrongly christened! He conceives to win,
While risking nothing. He shall sharply learn
I do not rise a loser from such game,
And, having won, will all my earnings hand
Unto straightforward Surrey. Tell me, Margery,
Am I still lovely!

MARGERY

Ah! too lovely, far.

I would not be as beautiful as you.

LADY HERON

And never be it ! Pray to be halt or blear,
Ill-favoured, hunch-backed, anything you will,
Save hazard sport for foraging desire.
But now the Song !

MARGERY

Love is a dream
From which we awaken,
When the day-breakers gleam,
And the night is forsaken,
And all that we longed for
Is given and taken.

But the dream will return
And the darkness refold us,
And the vigil-light burn,
Yet be none to behold us.

*Oh, come to me quickly,
And hush us and hold us !*

*For life is so clear
And the daylight so glaring,
That we tremble and fear
Lest the heart be too daring.
Soft moonlight, lone starlight,
Are secret and sparing.*

*So love we and dream,
Till from love we awaken,
When the day-breakers gleam
And the night is forsaken,
And the rose that was rosebud
Unfolds and is shaken.*

LADY HERON

I like the singer better than the song.

You sang it deftly.

MARGERY

Yet the song is sweet.

LADY HERON

Perchance too sweet, and pleaseth you because
Scarce understood. Things only half surmised
Are sweeter, Margery, than things wholly seen.

MARGERY

But is that not the very spell of song,
Of poetry, love, life, earth, heaven, everything?

LADY HERON

Yes, that is so.

D

MARGERY

Wherefore then speak so plain
As—nay, forgive me—oftentimes you do?

LADY HERON

Because there is a yearning at my heart,
Or call it what you will, that will be out!

MARGERY

Then slacken it with hyssop and with tears,
And so subdue it.

LADY HERON

Easily said!

MARGERY

And done.

My soul my sovereign is, whereto the flesh
Is a meek subject.

LADY HERON

O, but I ! But I

Am all rebellion, with no central sway,
From forehead unto footstep. But why prate ?
Hie to the Tower, and from the battlements
Strain your young gaze, and see if he be coming,
And then, then hasten down, to give me time
To tolerate his coming.

MARGERY

But, lady dear,

How shall I know 'tis he, till he be nigh ?

LADY HERON

Why, by the very air that will divide
To line his dignity. He walks the world
Like a stray god. If cometh he afoot,
Then know him by his strong disdainful stride ;

If throned upon the saddle, then his steed
Will arch its neck and fling its mane abreeze,
And fan the dust as though its hoofs were wings
To waft him to love's haven. Now, go ! go !
Nay, just a moment. Hand me the mirror, dear,
And—is there any ringlet out of place,
Or have I ruffled half my folds with gust
Of my own blowing ? What a whirl am I
Of storming and subsiding !

[Taking the mirror.]

Let me see.

MARGERY

There's not a hair nor tippet crimp awry.
You seem a Queen caparisoned for Court,
Ready for all the chivalry of the South
To come and kiss the queenhood of your hand.

LADY HERON

Then, to the Tower, and I will wait for him,
With my attendant train of longing thoughts.

[Exit MARGERY.]

[Enter SURREY. LADY HERON, who has gone a few paces
in the other direction to put down the mirror, turns,
and seeing him, rushes eagerly towards him.]

Surrey! My Surrey!

[He embraces her, then paces the room.]

Here, before the hour
Named in your message, never here too soon.

SURREY

Because the hour of battle is more near
Than hope foresaw.

LADY HERON

How did you hither come?
You surely did not risk your life, alone?

SURREY

Life ? Risk ? Life is but one long risk,
With something of precaution in it too,
In men not daft with daring, or with love.

LADY HERON

You never would be that.

SURREY

Forefend I should !

Scouts have I out by every curve and ford
Of Tweed or Till, dingle, or dip, or wood,
Or treacherous dimple of this smiling Border ;
And if one carle or gallowglass should stir
The bracken where I had not bid him hide,
His life were worthless as a mountain hare's,
With sleuthhounds on its rear, and van, and flank ;
So came I unaccompanied.

LADY HERON

To pass

[She lays her hand on his shoulder.]

A peaceful hour with *me* !

SURREY

Yes, and to scan

From Ford's commanding fourfold parapets

The land around with a yet wider gaze,

And keener scrutiny. Say, shall I find

Stair, door, and battlement-approaches free,

Or is there one to open ?

LADY HERON

Free as is

The whole of the world and womankind—to you !

Shall you be long atop ?

SURREY

Not long, 'tis sure,
For I have ta'en close survey of the scene
Where I shall force the fight on, pushed James round
From ground of his own choosing, till he stands
With back to England, and to Scotland I.
At Twizell ford my fellows crossed the Till,
The stream breast high, and, had they but been
ta'en

In that short hour of hazard, as I saw
That they were safe against, the feat had been
Beyond their force. I cannot think but James
Lies not in camp, for I have oft been told
Expert he is in cunning purposes,
And something must have held him elsewhere, so
The deed swift followed on the thought, and now
I have him at the 'vantage.

LADY HERON (*aside*)

Fortune thus

Fosters Love's strategy !

SURREY

What said you, lady?

Forgive me, somewhat absent.

LADY HERON

That victory, then,

Is yours beforehand?

SURREY

Victory rests with Heaven,

Though have I noted, in this wavering world,

God's wont gives victory to the wise and strong,

Being just in His arbitrament, and loth

To aid the dolt and laggard,

LADY HERON

Here, here is need
For no such forceful weapon. For awhile
Turn them to me, won long since, not to woo,
Yours, maybe not God's gift, but yours withal.
Will you go first, or last, unto the Tower ?

SURREY

Nay, as you will ; but better, hap, the last,
For should I, gazing, see some gap unstopped,
Some vantage knoll unheld, I straight should hence
To seize it fast, and could not then return.

LADY HERON

Go last, then, but I pray you go not soon,
We have been severed, O, so long, so long !

SURREY

I cannot bide me, anyway, for long ;
My thoughts are other-where.

LADY HERON

They ofttimes are.

I do suspect you deem all womankind
Mere margin of man's life, past which its text
Runs on continuously !

SURREY

So they are,
And so they should be ! What, forsooth, is love,
Dainty, delicious pastime though it be,
When paragoned with statecraft or with war,
War above all ? Love seems, compared with these,
As sleeping unto waking, half-shut eyes

To nerve and sinew, body, and brain, and spirit,
Astir, aflame, with splendid speculation,
Ambition, daring, danger, all that make
Existence godlike. Man by war creates
New worlds, and fashions them to meet his will,
Aye, after his own image, if he win.
Its counters are not lives alone, but kingdoms,
The future, and the fateful things to be.
Now, by God's Passion, on this very hour,
And on its undetermined issue, hangs
The future of two great opposing Realms,
Which never should be otherwise than one.
Let England win, and then the brawny race
Of stubborn Scotland, brawny, and brave, and stern,
Impetuous as its peat-embrown'd burns,
Yet fixed of purpose as its deep-laid hills,
Shall mix with ours to enrich and strengthen it.

Should Scotland win,—but Scotland must not win ;
Or, if it should, and you then love me still,
Command the faggots for my funeral pyre,
Discard your gauds, and loosen your long hair,
And wail upon my lifeless body, for I
Should not survive that day of ignominy.

LADY HERON

O, but the victory, certain, will be yours !
Tell me it will, it will !

SURREY

God grant it may !
Yet, even if it were not, for there is
No hazard in this world like that of war,
Not victor, yet not vanquished, one can fall
'Mid noble shouts of battle fray, and then,

Soul, ransomed thus from flesh by death's rich
stroke,

May wing its way—who knows?—to fairer realms,
In quest of spiritual battle-fields.

But like some guttering candle to go out,
With women whimpering round, and faltering
tongues

Of useless leeches, on a soft-stuffed bed,
That's not a death for soldiers, or for men !

LADY HERON

Where did you get this mastery over life,
Love, death, and all things ?

SURREY

From my sovran Lord,
Will, and its consort, Reason. These unthroned,
Life would to me be but disordered dream,

A jumbled reminiscence of a past
Prior existence in an unshaped world,
Where God, and Law, and Discipline were not.

LADY HERON

But, if men perish on the battle-field,
Asudden, and at once, have they then time
To make their peace with God?

SURREY

Do your duty,
Be loyal to your country and your King,
Then will you always be at peace with God,
With self, and whatsoever else there be,
Here or elsewhere.

[Seating himself by her.]

Now let us talk awhile
Of gentler themes, and tell me how you pass
Your days and Autumn twilights.

LADY HERON

Drearily,

When Surrey is not nigh, and then I wait
Till he shall please to come, apart, alone,
Or with my little maid, and talk of him,
She curious, but not understanding half
Of what I say. And then I take my spindle,
Till it goes whirling like my thoughts, but twists
To better purpose.

SURREY

You are moulded fair,
Comely and winsome, shaped for happiness
'Mid the four walls of home ; for motherhood,
And honest household rule. Tell me why
There sounds an endless yearning in your voice,
Like to the wave that wandereth to and fro,
Wailing for something, nowhere to be found.

LADY HERON

Because I wail for *you*! The Universe,
Without you, were not boundary enough
To fold my longings.

SURREY

Where is your rightful lord?

LADY HERON

At James's Court, prisoner or fugitive,
I know not which.

SURREY

Shall I try ransom him?

LADY HERON

He scarce is worth the ransoming. He is
One of those men, born insignificant,

E

Who make the little world in which they live
Nor larger, nor yet smaller, for being in it :
Smaller, if anything. Know you King James ?

SURREY

Not in the flesh ; only his effigy,
In Scottish embassy to Harry's Court
At the betrothal of Queen Margaret.
He's a well-looking man.

LADY HERON

And is he brave ?

SURREY

He is a King, and therefore is he brave,
He is a King, therefore magnanimous :
For there is something, somehow, in a Crown,

That gives the wearer princely dignity,
Or why should common folk bow down to it?

LADY HERON

Stand *you* in awe of it?

SURREY

Well, maybe not,
But I do honour and revere its wearer,
As doth become a leal and faithful subject !
Though in my inmost thought I will confess
The noblest of all Sceptres is the Sword :
The Sword of Peace, if men will have it so,
If not, the Sword that strikes and is resolved,
Nor scabbarded till Victory tilts the scales !
I have heard it said James is a poet, too,
Who moulds soft lays to lime frail women's hearts,
And make them stay their fluttering.

LADY HERON

Did *you* ever

Fashion a verse ?

SURREY

Once, but a battle-song,

Rough and ungainly, lacking quite in numbers,

For aught I know. In these luxurious days,

Men seem to have learnt soft verse from Italy.

But, as for mine, the soldiers in the camp

Will troll it round their watch-fires through the night,

Till they wax drowsy. Somehow thus it runs :—

SURREY'S BATTLE-SONG

I

*Now Knight, and now Yeoman,**Now horseman, now bowman,**Up, up from your slumber, and stream to the fray !*

*Strong archer, stern pikemen,
Fleet and sturdy alike, men,
Forth, forward, and strike, men,
Till the foe from your faces are fleeing away !*

II

*Leave matron and maiden,
Leave sleek tresses braiden,
Think only of fighting for country and King ;
Of the tussle before ye,
Of duty and glory,
Of names great in story,
That manhood exults in, and troubadours sing !*

LADY HERON

It peals like sounded clarion, stirs the blood,
Is of your very self that felt and wrote it.

SURREY

Feel thoughtfully and fervidly enough,
Words sing themselves.

LADY HERON

But sang you ne'er of love?

SURREY

Not that I mind me. But I rarely dwell
On thoughts of love, save when I bide with *you*.

LADY HERON

And then you give me only half your thought.

SURREY

What would you, lady? More were treachery,
Desertion, cowardice, and loss of manhood.
We live in troublous and entangled times,

And 'tis my business to deal with them :
And if in snatched reposefulness I hear
Flourish of trumpet or distress of State,
To these I straightway hasten. Could you love,
Or yield to, any man that did not do so ?

LADY HERON

Not wholly, solely. But methinks I could
Love to be loved by many a smaller man,
To prove my power, and test his feebleness.
For thuswise are we framed.

SURREY

Nay, nay, not all.
Methinks my mother was not like to that.
And I have whimsically deemed, though I
In such deep matters am but simpleton,
There are three sorts of women : they who move

Men to warm tenderness, not hot desire,
And these the best and noblest. Then there are
Those who o'er-brimmingly unsluice the blood,
And set it flowing and fuming in men's veins,
Then straightway tranquillise it in their own
More deep continuous current ; nor would I
Defame such natures, for in sooth they are
Honest, though oftentimes differently named,
But would reserve reproving and reproach
For those, the last and lowest sure of all,
Who kindle fires to see how these will burn,
And not for need or comfort.

LADY HERON

You are not
The simpleton you deem you. Surrey ! Surrey !
You know too much.

SURREY

Who is it then that taught me ?

LADY HERON

Perchance 'twas I. For verily I am
Compounded of all three.

SURREY

Smother the third !

For women who are that, and that alone,
Should have a millstone round their neck, and find
An unbaptiz'd coffin in the sea,
Or be exposed upon the mountain-side,
Ere they have grown to be it.

LADY HERON

For you, for you,

I fain would be the first ! Withal, I am
The second, when you will it !

SURREY

Rashly said,
And no less generously ; and I should be
The most ungrateful of ungrateful men
Did I not own me that I still must live,
Your bankrupt debtor !

LADY HERON

Tell me that again !
For when you pass from rough mood into smooth,
I feel as once I felt, homing from France,
When the tumultuous mountains of the sea
Subsided to a still blue land-locked lake,
And, husht, we glided into haven.

SURREY

Words

Still have you at your beck, all silky soft,

That seem to come like petted doves to call,
And settle where you will, coo at your lips,
Sue you as though you were their very mate,
And they had come to make their nest with you.
Learned you the trick in France, where I am told
'Tis best acquired, and men too practise it?
Time was, soft lays were left to Troubadours,
And steel had been ashamed to indite sleek rhymes.
But now some bravest warriors that I know
Fondle and finger a sonnet till they mould
Its roundness to their fancy.

LADY HERON

Like to James!

But, as for me, I have no trick acquired
From France or anywhere, unless it be
The trick of tricking out myself in this
Becoming flimsiness—if so it be—

SURREY

Bewitching even as your very self,
Or with it, or without it ! But—I must go.

LADY HERON

Nay, go not yet ! Stay just a little while.

SURREY

It is the hour ; nor tarried I so long,
But that, so far as human wit can work,
I have left nought to chance. So now, farewell !

(A burst of battle MUSIC is heard in the Court without.)

LADY HERON

Hark ! What is that ?

SURREY

The rough-hewn battle-song
I told you of, my wilder fellows troll

Around their watch-fires ere they sleep o' nights.
Who may these singers be?

LADY HERON

The Troop of Ford,
Mustering to start for Flodden. Will you not
Speak some brave words to them before they go,
And make their hearts as valiant as yours?

SURREY

If such should be their wish, and likewise yours.

[Enter the TROOP led by DONALD GREY.]

SURREY

Captain and Yeomen of the lands of Ford,
I came to see you martial-mustered here,
As so I now behold you, hill-men all,
And, like your hills, inured to winds and war.

I am a soldier, destitute of words,
And stammering in speech, the craft of peace.
But honour is the chiefest quest of man,
And, of all honours or in war or peace,
The greatest is, for Fatherland to die,
And, nearest that, to hazard life for it.
King Hal for England's honour rides through
 France,
That hath against him enmity proclaimed,
And into unjust quarrel Scotland dragged.
With Scotland it were natural that we
All peacefully and neighbourly should live ;
But against England and her royal rights
Should the whole world unmannerly conspire,
Then, whilst our War-keels danced upon the wave,
Along our coasts the clarion would outshrill
The clanging trumpet, and your feathered shafts

Bristle along cliff, shingle, promontory,
And bid the ravenous universal hosts
Come, if they dare ! I am for Peace ; we all
Count peace the rightful heritage of man,
But peace with justice, liberty, and honour.
You, you brave Border striplings, mustered here,
To-day shall clustered stand behind my Knights,
And be a portion of my bodyguard ;
And never an inch go backward till you see
Surrey, a craven, flying from the foe.
Now, God protect you all !

[Exeunt the TROOP, headed by DONALD, singing
SURREY'S song.]

LADY HERON

The battle done,
You hither will return ?

SURREY

That rests with Heaven,
Again I say, and issue of the struggle.
Should James be routed, and his flight cut off,
Haply I may. But who as yet can see
Which way a worsted rabble-rout will wind,
Whichever wins the day. So now, farewell.
But, ere I go, accept this little sprig
Of fresh white heather plucked on mountain-side.

LADY HERON

O, welcome gift ! A pledge at least by me
Of endless love, and love's expectancy !
One moment ! See, your sword-belt is awry ;
Let me adjust it. There ! One more farewell !
Would that it never ended ! Victory light
And linger on your banner till its folds

Unfurl to flash the splendour of your name

Around a dazzled world !

[Exit SURREY. LADY HERON mounts the steps of the embrasure, and watches him as he departs, the FORD TROOP singing his BATTLE-SONG.]

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE as in Act I

(MARGERY. DONALD)

MARGERY

I would you were not going, yet I would
Not have you stay behind ! Full well I know
What is man's part in this resisting world :
To breast aside a sea of opposites,
Wave after wave, then, buoyed upon their crest,
Be borne to whatsoever end he will.
And yet, and yet, my dream of happiness—
But this is not the fitting hour for dreams,
And so I will be silent.

DONALD

Nay, but tell me.

No dream of yours will e'er untimely be

To my attentive ear.

MARGERY

It is that you

Should fare to none save happy, peaceful fields,

And I should go with you where'er you went :

To watch the seed-corn dropped into the drill,

Or leaning oat-stooks dotted o'er the stubble,

Like weathered tents, a bivouac of peace ;

Or, best of all, when comfortable Winter

Brings the long evenings and the blazing hearth,

To sit together by our own fireside.

DONALD

All this shall be when transitory War
Hath, like the hurtling hurricane, spent its force,
Or rolled elsewhere.

MARGERY

Pray Heaven that it be soon !

Ah me ! weak women have the harder part
In this unequal world : to wait in dread,
Having no power to shape or ward the issue,
On which depends their doom.

DONALD

Heaven's equity

Will otherwhere the balance readjust.
If nobleness the greatest greatness be,

As is my deepest Creed, then woman is
Greater, aye, even stronger, than is man.
So, of your goodness help me with your prayers
Your hopeful trust !

MARGERY

Take, then, this talisman,
Brought by Crusader from Jerusalem,
My Mother's gift ; then this one, last of all,
[Embraces him.]
To bring you home unscathed !

[Exeunt.]

[Enter LADY HERON.]

LADY HERON

Slave that I am !
And doomed to slavery by Love's feebleness !

Yet where's the woman would not rather be
Enslaved to such a lord, than ramble free
In quest of such another ! For it is
The yearning of us all to be enslaved ;
And O, how many in servitude there be,
Captive to conquerors weaker than themselves ! .
Chain like to that would I break, aye, and have
broken.

Fettered to fool or fondling ? Never, never !
It is their business to subdue, and ours
To be right willing subjects.
If only James do come, and I can stay
His going till the battle hath begun,
There's not a wile in woman's armoury
I will not use to keep him !

[Enter MARGERY.]

Did you see Surrey ?

MARGERY

He burst upon the Tower
While I was straining all my gaze to scan
If he were nigh.

LADY HERON

And on me, unaware,
As I was waiting for your warning, broke,
And stayed with me awhile. But you—but you—
What did you when his apparition streamed,
Like to the Royal Standard in the wind,
From topmost turret?

MARGERY

I stood mute for awe,
For dread, for—nay, in sooth I know not what,
And then craved leave to go. He bade me stay,
And serve him with my clear young eyes, he said,

For wider seeing. Then, with lordly thanks
And courtly majesty he sent me here.
I would not be an hour with him alone,
For all my vaunted moated maidenhood.

LADY HERON

And never be it ! For he roams the earth
With tender strength, bewitching not bewitched,
And that's the King for women, Margery !
Now you know more, indulge me in my sin,
As God, who made him what he is and us
Such as we are, sure will when comes the day
Of frailty's stern arraignment ; for we are
Finely poised vanes for men's imperious gusts
To veer at will. It oft is called caprice.
'Tis they who are capricious, and not we.
We—we—have too much Spring sap in our blood,

Too much of madcap April, which oft shows
E'en in our slow-decaying autumn days,
That leave our vanished loveliness and lures
Winter's lone retrospect and barren tears.

MARGERY

Is it true King James has had as many loves
As rumour says ?

LADY HERON

Likely enough, and more ;
And so the more to count and reckon with,
When his frail Kingship comes again one's way.

MARGERY

They say that paramours are the privilege
Of Princes and of Poets.

LADY HERON

A vulgar fancy !

They are not the privilege of any man,
But, from far-off dead patriarchal days,
Common to Kings, and poets, and common folk.
But, happier these perchance, obscurity,
None care to penetrate, leaves dark their weakness.

MARGERY

I do not understand these roaming loves,
But only one long love, one, one, one always,
Such as I give to Donald, and he to me.

LADY HERON

Well, maybe, Margery, *'tis* the only one ;
And that is why men never love at all,
And we by love are never satisfied,

Since it deserves, in them, another name.
But, as I heard a gallant once in France
Say, men are dispositioned so, they deem
Their first love is their last, their last their first.

[A sound of voices outside.]

LADY HERON

What is that stir without? Go, child, and learn!

[Exit MARGERV, and forthwith returns.]

MARGERV

A wandering minstrel in the court without
Claims audience, and will suffer no denial.

LADY HERON (*to* MARGERV)

'Tis the King!

Be sure of that, obedient to my bidding.

Conduct him hither, saying 'tis my will.

Then leave us, Margery. . . . O well-set snare !

[Exit MARGERY.]

[Enter KING JAMES in the disguise of a minstrel, which
he at once discards.]

[LADY HERON makes obeisance.]

KING

Rise ! I would rather welcomed be by you,
Than knelt to by all subjects in the world.

LADY HERON

I feared that you were in the battle-field,
Protecting Scotland !

KING

And so I am, or was,
And shortly shall be once again. But now,

I come to win—nay, the word 'scaped me—woo,
A fairer and yet more protected Realm.

LADY HERON

Do not a scattered band of scouts and spies
Watch all the ways?

KING

Not the long wayless way
Whereby I came ; for Surrey holds the South,
My host the North, half-circle each ! Beside,
There is a rude but ready-witted man,
Threaded me here, who can play many parts,
Cutpurse or beggar, whining now for alms,
Now flinging them abroad ; and this disguise
Enforcing with his own. Fear not for me !

LADY HERON

But what of Surrey and his English host?

KING

Nigh face to face with mine by Flodden Field,
Where I have all my dispositions made,
The Cheviots in my rear, the Till afront,
Huntley and Home commanding on the left,
Argyll and Lennox on the right, myself
Reserved to lead the centre. But enough,
Enough of war's rough issues. How is she,
The camp of my affections, utmost range
Of my heart's conflict?

LADY HERON

As you see !

KING

How fair !

Fairer no gift could make you. Yet I have
Brought jewels to this jewel, pearls to pearl

Whiter than all the whiteness of the foam
The far-off seas have petrified to pearl
To round the throat and curl among the curls,
And meekly pray you wear these for the sake,
Not of their loveliness, but of your own,
Till men shall think them lovelier because
Of that from which they shine.

LADY HERON

Nay, you misjudge.
'Tis not for gaze of men fair women wear
Necklace, tiara, clasp, and stomacher,
But to outshine, o'ershadow, other women.

KING

You need no jewels of the sea or mine,
Sapphire, or pearl, or diamond, to do that.

Bejewelled by your beauty, you outgleam
The beauties of all Courts in Christendom.
But, your devoted servitor, I have
Another and a far more precious gift
Provided for your pleasure, self forgot
And self's less generous thoughts.

LADY HERON

What may that be?

KING

Your husband.

LADY HERON

He!

KING

A prisoner in my hands,
For—nay, what matters it for what, well known
To you no less than me and all the world,—

Withal your husband, I in vain besought
That you would visit at my Court, he bound,
On parole, as a formidable foe
Along this wavering Border, not to fly
And join my enemies, I have set free,
Without condition.

LADY HERON (*anxiously*)

When will he be here?

KING

Not yet, not yet, save homeward track there be
Unknown to folk familiar less with hills,
Gorges, and torrents, of this much-scarred land,
Than native lords whose life hath dwelt within it.
Shall I recite the latest song I made,—
One makes so many,—on the endless theme
I see before me now?

G

LADY HERON

I pray you, Sir !

KING

I

*Oh, fair are Scotland's birken woods,
And fair her becks and burns,
When maiden buds fling back their hoods,
And pairing-time returns.
But fairer than her mavis groves
And sweeter than her streams,
When loving lad with lassie roves,
Is the Lady of my dreams.*

II

*Now were I lord of Stirling town,
Or Scotland's sceptred Chief,*

*I would fling down my robe and crown,
To share her bliss and grief;
With her to moil in mountain field,
When oaten stooks are dried,
To be her shield thro' darkening weald,
Then slumber at her side.*

LADY HERON

Which of the ladies at King James's Court
Inspired that amorous liting roundelay?

KING

The one sole lady at the one sole Court
Whereat he pays his homage.

[Kisses her hand.]

LADY HERON

Deftly answered,
Following so well on lay so dexterous.

When Provence was the realm of Chivalry,
You would have been the Prince of Troubadours.
'Tis said that Surrey never turns a stave.

KING

He is to-day then much behind the fashion.

LADY HERON

He wakes to thought of war and statesmanship,
And sleeps to dream of statesmanship and war.
There is a towering terror in his gaze,
A menace in his very quietness.
Were I a man, his friend I fain would be,
Never his enemy.

KING

But, being a woman, how
Do such stern elements affect your heart?

LADY HERON

My heart? Good Sir, they leave it as it was,
In awe, the natural attitude of woman.
It is the mind he dominates, such mind
As the heart leaves scant room for in us women.

KING

But he? Has he no room for love and joy,
Even in the throng of statesmanship and war?

LADY HERON

Surmising if I answer, I should say
Love is with him a flitting interlude,
A trivial, restful, and refreshing sport,
From weightier business. He is nought but Soldier.
No poet-lover.

KING

May not a man be both ?
Kings, soldiers, poets, all are flesh and blood.

LADY HERON

And all as changeable ! with flesh as quick
As the sere ling to any trivial flame,
And blood as quick to rise and fall as spate,
And slackening water, in our Border Tweed.

KING

They say that womenkind are like to that.

LADY HERON

They say ! They say ! It is you poets say it,
Because that you have got the saying of't ;
The being of it sooth to both being common,
And, with your leave, to Kings. Were 't otherwise,

It were a dull and stationary world,
I would as lief be out of. At the best,
'Tis somewhat drear.

KING

Till love enliven it,
Then life becomes a cheerful road enough,
Save that the milestones pass too rapidly.

LADY HERON

It may be so for Kings, but not for Queens.
I would not be King James's Queen for all
The titles and the robes in Christendom.
But, ever since men sate upon a throne,
Queens have too often but a sighing time.

KING

Unless they be fair queens by courtesy,

Then are they more besought than any King,
Having yet more to give.

LADY HERON

And when they give it,
Are straight dethroned.

KING

To sit on yet some other,
If that be so. But men there are, dear lady,
Who do not tire of such fair Queens as you,
And, by the Saints of Scotland, I am one.

LADY HERON

What is this love we prate about so much,
Honouring the most inconstant thing on earth
With specious character of constancy,
And singing and re-singing of it as if

It by us still abided, though it be
Itself as transitory as any song?
A mother's or a foster-mother's love
For peevish babe ; a sister's for a brother,
He all unworthy ; soldiers for some cause,
Or good or bad, or right or wrong, deemed good,
Imagined right, for thinking it will serve ;
Aye, even a ripened woman's for ripening man,
Who never ripens,—these, an you will, deserve
The title and the dignity of Love ;
But not the fawnings of ferocious men,
Quick promises, more quick forgetfulness.
One might as well deck with the name of love
Fierce forays on our Border for sleek kine,
Or poise of hovering hawk before it swoop
Down on fear-fascinated dove that should
Fly when it crouches, tears its entrails out,

Casting its foolish feathers to the wind,
Then wings its satiated lust aloft
In quest of further victims ! But I rave,
And you smile mockingly.

KING

Nay, who can tell
The meaning of a smile ? There are so many ;
The smile of innocence, the smile of guilt ;
Of sympathy, disdain, I know not what,
The backward-pondering, forward-looking smile,
And what some call the philosophic smile,
And finally, wae's me ! the smile of death.

LADY HERON

Nay, that's the last and wisest smile of all.

KING

You are much too wise to-day. But, as for me,
I never have but one same smile for you,
The smile of love and longing.

LADY HERON

You forget

There is the smile of cloistered holiness,
And chaste seclusion. I have a little maid.
And she hath that, and dearly do I love her,
Because I have it not.

KING

Well, in little maids.

But women who worship holiness disdain
The man that hath it.

LADY HERON

Since he thus disdains us.

In man we worship manhood, valour, strength,

Aye, waywardness, if it but honour us.

Is that not why ?

KING

You are askew to-day ;

I cannot set you straight. Now must I go,

And in the hurly-burly of the fight

With Surrey and his Southrons half forget

Fair Ford and fairer chatelaine.

LADY HERON

Go not yet !

You seem but just to have come. How you lack
patience

And fail to mark that what I feel to-day

I may not feel to-morrow, what I felt
But yesterday, to-day I feel no more.
We are but dancing bubbles on the stream,
And man the forceful current.

KING

So you say,
But, when I am anear you, then meseems
You are the current, and the bubble I.

LADY HERON

Recite to me once more ; for poesy is
The drug that brings the mind oblivion,
Wherein we drowse 'twixt two opposing worlds,
Sleeping and waking, heedless which is which,
If either, both, or neither, life or death,
And know not which were sweeter.

KING

*Love, they say, is charm and cheat,
April fancy, summer heat,
Leaving wintry cold and sleet ;
Wandering as the cuckoo's cry
When the Springtime days go by,
And we smile and know not why ;
False in form, and garb, and face,
Screen unto a deadly chase,
Woman's sorrow, man's disgrace.
Who is it that slanders so
Highest, holiest thing below,
Upward-straining mortals know ?
Life's last loftiest peak and crest,
Worthiest longing, purest quest,
Heaven's clear height made manifest ;*

*Whence we look adown and scan
All the ways and works of man,
God's wide world, and mighty plan.*

*Be His will by us obeyed.
Love we all that He hath made,
In the sunshine, in the shade ;*

*Proud and lowly, great and small,
Hill, and lake, and waterfall,
Sweet, sad woman, most of all !*

LADY HERON

That is a deeper and diviner strain,
And so too large to fit my littleness ;
Withal I do commend the mind that made it ;
Yet see how language' self becomes a cheat,
And very pandar, when employed by love.

Love signifies a hundred different things,
And with its better meaning veils its worse.
'That is the truth of it.

KING

Now, go I must,
Or shall be late.

LADY HERON

More reason you should stay,
To prove you love me.

KING

Doth not my coming—Hark !
Methought I heard a far-off clarion shrill.

LADY HERON

We hear that which we listen for, and see
The thing expected, though are neither there.

Shall we ascend the Tower, and thence descry
What you would know ?

KING

'Tis better that I went.

LADY HERON

What ! all this wooing, and not one embrace !

[Tenders him her cheek, which he kisses, as she affects to hold him. While she is doing so, door is thrown open, and enter her husband. Seeing JAMES and LADY HERON's attitude, he halts, and looks from one to the other.]

LADY HERON (*with perfect composure*)

His Majesty, King James !

SIR WILLIAM

I did not think

So soon again to see the Scottish King.

Under my roof-tree, too, and patent 'tis

H

No stranger there. In war no less than peace,
In camp as at his Court, so it would seem,
He needs must have his light-o'-loves to ease
The weight of Kingship and the load of State.
He had done better and more royally
To keep his prisoner than betray him thus,
Or be more timely in his treachery.
But, Madam, it is you, you first of all,
I ask to what, long absent from my home,
I this dishonourable honour owe
From the seductive semblance of a King,
Who on the eve of battle leisure finds
To play the royal cuckoo. Now, the truth !
For I will suffer nothing but the truth,
Have I to pluck it forcibly from both.

LADY HERON

Then you shall hear the truth, and so shall he !
He came to woo me, and he came in vain,
As, if he came a thousand times, he would.
Think you I know not of the loves at home,
The loves abroad,—the two are truly one,—
Of his most amorous Northern Majesty,
Or that I have not heard of Lady Scrope,
His latest leman ! I am merely one,
Or was to have been, could he have had his way,
Of the frail puppets of his gracious favour.
But you, my lord, perhaps will answer me,
If that your wife be fashioned like to that,
And if I bear a rival near *my* throne ?

KING

Great Heaven ! Who is it, then, that brought me
here ?

LADY HERON

'Twas I ! 'Twas I, exultant to have done it.
Hie to that embrasure, and gaze beyond,
And see where now your army lies encamped,
With back to England, road to Scotland barred ;
Your hosts disadvantageously swung round
By English skill ! You whining all the while
Here at my feet, and, like an honest man,
Whining, confess, in vain ! I lured you here,
For England's sake, for sake of English Throne,
Her King, Her Cause !

SIR WILLIAM

Pray Heaven the tale be true.
I will return anon, when this strange guest

Hath ta'en his leave, whom here I leave to be
Dismissed or stayed by you, as seems you best.

[Exit SIR WILLIAM.]

KING

Magnificently acted !

LADY HERON

Duped again !

I heard the trumpets riding on the wind,
Here while you knelt and simpered of your love.
You will be late, and I it was who kept you !
O, I am dead weary of your sighs
And songful suing. See you never, man,
The world's a woman, waiting to be subdued,
Not wooed, but won. Keep back your tenderness,
Until they have surrendered. Crush them ! Out-
rage them !

And awe them into love's submissiveness !
Then leave them to their languishing, and go,
Stronger for that imperative embrace,
And hew your way to whatso throne you will.

KING

Can it be true? Tell me it is not true.
I cannot think so fair a thing as you
Can be so false.

LADY HERON

Or man so fatuous.
Doubt it, believe it, doubt it then again,
Nor ever know if truth, or doubt, be true.
But 'twould mis-seem me to forget to thank
Your Majesty for liberating thus
My loving lord, so timely in return,

So welcome here at any time. Now go !
Or you will be too late for your defeat,
As now you are for victory !

KING

Spake then
The Apparition at Linlithgow true,
And do these warnings from a bodyless world
Forbode our Fate? "*Go not to war with Eng-
land !*
Or, if the hotness of your blood demand
That sanguinary ordeal, beware,
Beware of woman's glamour, woman's wiles."
Farewell ! with whom none ever can fare well,
As fair as Heaven, yet more false than Hell !

[Exit.]

LADY HERON

Farewell ! Not fair, though false. Come to me,
Surrey,
And I will yield you all I have to give,
My love, my lord, my conqueror, my King !
My merciless Commander !

END OF ACT II

ACT III

SCENE :—The same as in Acts I and II

SIR WILLIAM (*alone, pacing the gallery*)

Is the tale true? Or true in part, in part
False, as such tales in truth are apt to be?
Do Kings sue ever in vain to women's ears?
Not to their ears, if oftentimes to their hearts,
Nor often to—God! how is one to know?
A woman's fancy is more easily moved
Than is her blood. I never could move either,
Her proud cold ladyship's the least of all,
And by her very coldness have been made

More cold to others. But a King ! A King !
With throne, and crown, and royal robes set off,
Homage of men, and love of other women,
Or felt or feigned, fond expectation strained
In the loose bosom of the fond and frail,
Till virtue, honour, vow, fidelity,
Into the circling pool of harlotry
Are whirled and whelmed ! O, if I but could know,
Could know, could learn !

[Enter MARGERY—seeing SIR WILLIAM, she hesitates.]

Nay, go not, Margery !

[Aside.]

Here sure is one can tell, if any can. . . .

[To MARGERY, abruptly.]

Saw you King James, when he was here to-day ?

MARGERY

A moment, ere he went.

SIR WILLIAM

How looked he then?

MARGERY

Like to a man distraught.

SIR WILLIAM

Why, why distraught?

What cause had he?

MARGERY

I pray you, do not ask.

SIR WILLIAM

But ask of you I must. Say truly, Margery,

Do you love Lady Heron?

MARGERV

With all my being,
Heart, soul, mind, body, service, everything.

SIR WILLIAM

Then you would lie for her?

MARGERV

I trust I should not.
Nay, more, I trust I never shall have need.

SIR WILLIAM

Not—not to save her honour?

MARGERV

Honour gone,
What then were left to save?

SIR WILLIAM (*aside*)

True. And still truer,
We only lie to cover other lies,
And wounded honour with dishonour veil,
To save it from persistent penalty.

[TO MARGERY.]

King James for Lady Heron hath—a fancy?

MARGERY

Belike he has. It is a way men have
With comely women, I have heard it said.

SIR WILLIAM

And Lady Heron a—fancy for King James?

MARGERY

O no, my lord ! That were a different way,
A different, worse, and far more dangerous way.

SIR WILLIAM

How know you that her thoughts not that way
wend?

MARGERY

Because I saw him come, I saw him go,
Coldly received, disdainfully dismissed.

SIR WILLIAM

Then why was he received?

MARGERY

You know Kings must be,
Must—must. But surely, sir, you understand?

SIR WILLIAM

He hath a pleasing and a winning air.

MARGERY

Is not that kingly?

SIR WILLIAM

Writes love-ditties, too—

MARGERY

Music, and verse, and both are sweet to women.

SIR WILLIAM

And flattery, Margery.

MARGERY

Haply, sir, and flattery.

Are men indifferent to it?

SIR WILLIAM

Tell me, then?

My lady hath a fancy for no man?

MARGERY

How can we mortals read each others' hearts?
God only can do that. You ask too much.
I pray you let my answering suffice
A question wiselier put by none of us
Anent another.

[Enter SENESCHAL.]

SENESCHAL (*to* SIR WILLIAM)

Go you not, good my lord, to Flodden Field,
Where gone have all your fighting men, save those
Who needs must stay behind to sentry Ford?

SIR WILLIAM

And gone, I trust, to join the English camp.

SENESCHAL

So 'tis surmised, assumed. Withal, who knows?
We Border folk are sparing of our speech,

Covert in thought. It is the Border way,
And many a man is deemed of English pulse,
Whose heart beats secretly with Scottish hopes.
But, go you there, they there too will remain,
Faithful, leastways, to you, their rightful lord.

SIR WILLIAM

Give me my armour ; battle-axe and sword,
Borne by my ancestor at Bannockburn,
And trusty still.

SENESCHAL

They hang upon the wall.

[SIR WILLIAM dons his armour, assisted by SENESCHAL and
MARGERIE, and exit accompanied by both.]

[As the door closes, enter LADY HERON.]

LADY HERON

Gone ! All of them gone, unto the battle-field !

Surrey, to win, then hitherward return ;
James, to defeat and rout, unless Heaven should
Turn likelihood to baffled expectation,
As in this contrary surprising world
Will sometimes hap,—but not to-day, to-day,
In labour with two Kingdoms' fate, and mine !
My own untimely-coming lord, too, gone,
To join the English camp, his faith assured,
As well in sooth it should be, of the truth
Of what I swore to him, on this, on this.

[Taking up a crucifix, then laying it down.]

What proves his bearing and his fate in fight —
Well, need is none, to ponder upon that
Till—Let me think ! In truth I cannot think,
But only feel !

[Sees the pearls brought by JAMES.]

The lust-bribe of a King !

His precious pearls, and no more prized than he.

[Flings them on the table; takes from her bosom, and kisses,
the sprig of white heather given her by SURREY.]

This is the gift I cherish, for it is

Love's white flower 'mong the crimson crop of
blood.

[Enter SENESCHAL, MARGERY, and FOUR_MEN-AT-ARMS.]

SENESCHAL

Madam, the armies are in motion, and
The fight begun upon the nearward wing.
Shall I conduct you to the Tower?

LADY HERON

Unless

We here command the field.

[They mount the embrasure, whence Flodden Field is full
in their view, but not in that of the audience.]

SENESCHAL

Yes, perfectly.

Here, Madam, with your leave. Hence you survey
More advantageously the field.

LADY HERON

How plain

I can descry the Flodden slopes, and watch
The bowmen and the spearmen choose their ground,
Scatter or swarm, halt or advance, and—see !
The English feathers flicker through the air.

MARGERY

Aye, but fall short.

SENESCHAL

They measure but the ground.
Now have they found it, and how fast and thick,

Quicker than word to thought, they vault the space
Betwixt them and their aim. Do you see Surrey?

LADY HERON

Who doth not see the sun when it doth shine?
Even at that distance he half dazzles one,
And frightens one to look! He flasheth swift
Among the medley of the combatants,
Now here, now there, now everywhere at once,
According as one gazes.

MARGERY

But, look! look!

His fellows hovering eastward seem to waver
And breed disorder in the ranks behind.

LADY HERON

'Tis but a feint to draw the enemy,
I'll pledge me. What say *you*, Sir Seneschal?

SENESCHAL

Who can be sure but he who holds command?
Your younger eyes range more afield than mine,
And with a sharper vision.

LADY HERON

Seems it still
As if they yielded ground? Say, Margery!

MARGERY

Nay, there is such confusion, north with south,
One blade with the other, battle-axe with pike,
'Tis hard to say, save that they shock and shout,
And all alike strike fiercely, manfully,
And many fall, nor rise from where they fall.
God shrive their sins!

SENESCHAL

Death will do that for them.
Who die in battle for their mother-land
Are counted 'mong the martyrs. What fierce
shouting !

LADY HERON

Yes, and how plain one hears them ! To which side
Do your affections lean ?

SENESCHAL

Troth, noble lady,
The Border blood that flows within my veins,
Like Tweed itself, inclines now here, now there,
But ends by warming to the winning side,
As being the stouter.

MARGERY

Mine the losing one.

I cannot help though I be chidden for it.

SENESCHAL

'Tis the more maidenly.

LADY HERON

But where's the King?

Look where I will, I cannot see King James.

MARGERY

Look ! look ! He hastes all bonnetless and bare,

As though he cometh tardily. And see !

They bring him helm, and sword, and battle-axe,

And with hot haste he pusheth to the front.

LADY HERON

Then Surrey swift to meet him.

MARGERV

So he doth ;

And the two armies cluster them around,

As bees about their monarch.

LADY HERON

See you more ?

MARGERV

No, only flashing blades and glittering spears,

Arms lifted, huge men stricken to the knee,

Rising afresh and dealing stroke for stroke,

And others staggering, falling, trampled on,

To rise no more. I cannot brook the sight

Of savage strokes.

LADY HERON

But Surrey and the King?

SENESCHAL

It is no longer possible to say,
The melly grows so thick. But you descry,
There in the midway opening of the wood,
Nigh to the welling fountain that we know,
The rival Standards, and they *must* be there.
See! Scotland's is pushed back.

MARGERY

And now it droops
And is or lowered or folded from the sight.

LADY HERON

O, if I had but your young eyes! Yes! now,
Now—now—the Flag of England floats and flies
In triumph o'er the field. I see it plain.

SENESCHAL

It yet may be a feint ; for Scottish brains
Are canny as the Scottish blood is brave.
Yet seems it as though everywhere they feel
The weight of English numbers.

LADY HERON

And the force
Of Surrey's skill. His breast is full as stout,
His mind more domineering, will like steel
That takes not nay !

MARGERY (*aside*)

Be cautious, lady, lest
The carles surmise the secret of your heart.

LADY HERON

Think you I reck of that ? Were I but there,
I would bid the trumpets shrill it o'er the field,

'Till Flodden rang with Surrey's name and mine,
Proud to be reckoned 'mong his followers.

MARGERY

Bide, bide, till that he comes with victor wounds
Gaping for woman's tenderness.

SENESCHAL

All is lost !

Lost, lost, for Scotland is this brief affray.
See, everywhere they give, both flanks outflanked,
And forced back to the centre. None save fools
Now would abide for butchery, but find
Shelter from death, to face another fight.
Rout, panic, following fury, wend this way,
The worsted to bestride the Till before
Escape be barred, the victors to o'ertake

The scattered fugitives, and slay, slay, slay,
With blade and pike, and shouts of mastery.

MARGERY

O, I can look no more ! Donald is there !

LADY HERON

Now, glory be to Surrey !

MARGERY

And to Heaven !

You forget Heaven and God !

LADY HERON

Surrey is Heaven to me,

And God as well !

MARGERY

He would be first to chide,

If he did hear you ! Shall we not descend,

And order bracken and heather to be spread
For comfort of the sore who claim from Ford
God's truce and woman's pity?

LADY HERON

Yes! ajar

Roll Ford's main gate, that friend and foe alike,
Conquering and conquered, may such pallet find
As it can give them. [Aside] Sure, he too will come,
And let me loose his belt, and wipe his brow,
And tend upon his triumph.

SENESCHAL

I were shamed,
But for my stiffening limbs, to have been so nigh
A fight so stubborn, and not share in it.
But the years follow on the years, and we

Must travel with them till the end be reached,
When we shall neither fight nor fret us more.

LADY HERON

'Tis better to think less upon the end,
More of the march.

SENESCHAL

But thought runs before
That end of all our ends, and wonders what
Will be our welcome there !

LADY HERON

Well, to descend.

[Exeunt OMNES, save LADY HERON. MARGERY swiftly
returns.]

MARGERY

Gramercy! How they come! The gate stands wide,

Portcullis lifted, with the drawbridge down,
And through they pour, a miserable crowd,
Some hale, but gasping, others limping sore,
Few with their weapons, in their armour none,
For cast away in flight. The Seneschal
And all your servitors attend on them.
And, night at hand, those born to be obeyed
Call off the human sleuthhounds of the chase
From following into Ford.

LADY HERON

"Tis well. Go, see
The wounded lack for nothing Ford can give,
And bid the Chaplain wait upon the dying.

MARGERY

He is there, already.

[Enter DONALD.]

DONALD

Madam, Surrey comes,
With triumph-red retainers at his heels.

[Enter SURREY, with armed attendants, to whom he
signifies they are to retire.]

LADY HERON

Surrey ! Great Surrey !

[MARGERY seeks to retire with DONALD.]

SURREY

Go not, little maid !

It freshens one to see so young a thing,
After the brawny fellows of the fight.
She is a running stream to thirsty lips,
Is she not, Lady ?

LADY HERON

She indeed must be.
We elders are too stagnant.

K

SURREY

What a rout !

[LADY HERON undoes his belt, and MARGERY takes
his casque.]

But oh ! how many upon either side,
Stalwart and sinewy, still in April trim
Alike for war or wooing, who had not
Yet done with life, but had to put it off
At bidding of Bellona, lie outstretched,
With mire-fouled love-locks and death-tethered
limbs,
Mute as the marble that should honour them.

LADY HERON

Nay, tell me not of that ! I turn away
Even from the imagination of the sight.

SURREY

And yet—and yet ! Theirs was a glorious death,
Making them princely all, and their great souls
Have gone before the Judgment Throne of Heaven,
Absolved from life's offences by its close,
Henceforth to be—for so conceives my thought—
The chosen troop and bodyguard of God !
The field once won, pursuit delights me not.
There always are enough for that. Withal
One must not baulk them of their quarry quite,
Or never would they take the scent again,
That leads to victory. Never have I faced
So stout, so brave, so masculine a foe.
Now, by my English sword, these Scottish hearts
Held on unvanquished when outvanquished quite
By strategy and numbers. Could we twain,

Northward and southward of the Border, be
One kingdom and one people, I aver
In battle we could front an envious world,
And not be worsted.

LADY HERON

Saw you my husband?

SURREY

I ne'er have seen him, so I cannot say.
But I beheld an instant Ford's device
Among my wavering wing upon the right,
Wherein confusion reigned, and many seemed
Baffled and captured.

LADY HERON

And the Scottish King?

SURREY

Alas ! Alas ! Death holds him prisoner !
And all the wealth of all the world is not
Enough to rescue or to ransom him.

LADY HERON

Dead ! And how died he ?

SURREY

As becomes a King !

As I myself would die, did Heaven but leave
How to our choosing ! Late, but cramming close
The moments left him with heroic deeds ;
Here, there, restoring everywhere at once
The balance of the battle. Had he not been
Somehow belated,—why, I cannot say,—
And those first strokes that oft decide the last

Ere these be struck, not been at my disposing,
My vantage had been smaller, victory less,
My death-roll larger, and the King himself
Still 'mong the living.

LADY HERON

Tell me, to whose blade
Did the King fall?

SURREY

To mine, or rather, his own.
When first I saw him plain, he seemed inflamed
By something, some one, hidden from surmise,
And, when first eye to eye with me in fight,
He towered to strike, then rushed upon my sword,
Ere I had time to swerve with it, and aim
Not in the very death's eye of life's target,

But at some outer and less mortal mark,
That scores surrender. O, the pity of it !

LADY HERON (*to* MARGERY)

Go, child, unto the gate, and bring back word,
If there be couch and food enough for all.
You will not grudge her for a few brief moments
For service so intent and womanly ?

SURREY

Better employed than so she could not be.
Hence, tenderly, and see you how they fare,
For seeing you will make them fare the better ;
And bring back speedy word, for I myself
Would move among them, though less helpful,
i' faith,
Alike in speech and seeming.

[Exit MARGERY.]

Now, dear lady,
Who sent me to the shock with trustful words,
And make me welcome with such gracious ones,
Now that the deed is done, can Ford to-night
Concede to me its shelter?

LADY HERON

All Ford hath,
And all that is within it, save it be
That sock-lamb, Margery.

SURREY

Her tender years
And maidenhood ensure her sanctuary
From the most sacrilegious gaze alive.
Her whiteness shows against a sinful world,
Like wing-furled swan anchored on leaden mere.

LADY HERON

I spake in jest. But all the rest is yours,
As though you had, like Flodden, conquered it.
Your chamber hath been furnished hard by mine,
And by my hand sweetened with lavender,
Soft-carpeted from sound of voice or tread,
Pillow, and sheet, and quilt, and coverlet,
As for a kingly head ; drugs to deep slumber,
When further waking wearies you. Myself
Will linger on your wants, await your will,
And, if I only may your handmaid be,
I will be that, be more !

SURREY

Such lavish thought
Makes you all that and more. And, ere nurse
night

Brings sleep into the battlefield and us,
Here we will sit and talk—

LADY HERON

Yes ; talk alone—

SURREY

Of things that were, and things that are to be,
As far as man can see them. But before
Guerdon so welcome may befall me, I
Must write unto my Sovereign Lord, King Harry,
And tell him how his army fared to-day,
My preconceived moves and purposes,
And fortunate fulfilment.

LADY HERON

Would you be
Here, or within your chamber, for that task ?

SURREY

That duty, rather. Here, so it be your pleasure,
But now at once, wherever it may be.
For there are mounted messengers who wait
To speed them south, by rapid stage and change
Of stirrup and self-spurring steed.

LADY HERON

Here then

Remain, and I unwillingly will go,
And leave you quiet to your victor scroll.
But ere I quit you, just one little word !
King James, when you had left me, hither came,
And long while lingered.

SURREY

Here? And wherefore here?

Was it to make a survey of the field

From Ford's commanding towers? And did you
let——

LADY HERON

No! No! How wrongfully you misconceive!
Swift on your going hence he hither came,
In answer to my summons. Can you not
Surmise the wherefore?

SURREY

Not unless it were
For further ordering of his battle-ranks,
And you were forced to tolerate his will.
I blame you not.

LADY HERON

No, no, 'twas not for that.
He came—for me! Came in soft amorous mood,

A futile quest, as he hath come before.
I for your sake decoyed and kept him here.

SURREY

How? For *my* sake? *Here*, for my sake? And
why?

In very sooth I understand you not.

LADY HERON

How slow of wit men ofttimes are! Why, sure,
That he might sue, and linger, and be late!

SURREY

Late! And for what? You do not, cannot
mean——

LADY HERON

Late for the hurricane of battle, and so
Your victory more swift, and safe, and sure!

[Re-enter MARGERY.]

SURREY

How ! Can it be that I have heard aright ?

O, you abominable woman, you !

In what fell, dark, and execrable night

Were you begotten, that should straight have been

Stuffed out of living sight, a monstrous birth,

And never thought of more ; a lure, a lie,

For honest men in their enfeebled hours.

You have robbed me of my victory, James of life,

And Scotland of her King !

[She moves towards him, as though she would kneel and
cling to his sword.]

Touch not my sword !

[SURREY shrinking from her.]

And desecrate what is anointed still

With sacred blood of trusting King betrayed.

Were you a man, I would slay you where you stand,

And rid the earth of such deformity.
Away ! I care not where, so you away,
And cleanse the air by going. Nay, hide on
In your foul ambuscade, Hell's loathliest hags
Could not make fouler. By such fiends as you
Undoing comes to men, and death to kingdoms.

[Turns towards MARGERY.]

Poor little maiden ! so an you be wise,
You will let me find you safer company
And surer shelter.

MARGERY

I will stay with her,
And tend her with such comfort as I can,
Through woe, wrong, merciless or self-reproach,
Till she be comforted.

SURREY

Office of charity

Meet for your sex and years. But have a care
You do not catch the leprosy from her,
Whom you would cure !

[Exit.]

LADY HERON

O, I have lost them both,
One dead, one more disdainful than is death,
More deaf, more deadly ! Was it Surrey went ?
Where hath he gone ? For thither would I go,
Were it to join the doomed ! Both lost ! Both
gone !
While I am in this vast unfeeling world,
I, feeling all !

MARGERY

Then, Lady, let me send
For your liege husband, who will surely come.

LADY HERON

No, not for him ! Then should I sin again,
If I have sinned already. Be that all
The bitter balm that you can offer me,
Prithee be silent ! If he came, my heart
As at Heaven's very Judgment-seat would cry,
"Where, where is Surrey?" driving him afresh
Where he is better than with such as I.
O, 'tis a cruel and a captious world !
Because I blazon forth what others hide,
I am condemned. Aye, Surrey's self condemns me.
For what ? For loving. What is it he loves ?

Himself, his sword, his victory, his King,
His cause, his country—all of it, his, his, his !
And I—love him ! being thus the lesser thing,
The lesser and the viler ! Even now,
It scarcely seems so.

MARGERY

I am not your judge,
Neither is Surrey. If he be unjust——

LADY HERON

Man always is. He whirls away our will
With the convulsive currents of his own,
And then, disdaining us for lightsomeness,
Forthwith submerges.

[Enter an ENGLISH GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS.]

GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS

Lady, I am bid
By the Commander of the English Camp
To bring a gift for you to look upon.

LADY HERON

Then, he relents ! I knew he would relent.
He could not be so hard to one so soft,
Or stab to death one who but lives for him.

[Re-enter GENTLEMAN - AT - ARMS, followed by FOUR
SOLDIERS carrying on their shoulders a burden with a
military cloak cast over it, which they set down.
GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS takes off the cloak.]

GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS

Behold the gift !

LADY HERON

The body of King James !

Take it away. 'Tis good for nothing now.

It will nor kneel, nor fawn, nor sue, nor sing,

And irks in death more than it did in life.

GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS (*re-covering the body*)

Madam, I do as I was bid, and now

Must bear it to the Scottish Capital,

Where it awhile will lie in regal state,

Ere it be piously sepulchred to rest

With its long ancestry of Warrior Kings.

LADY HERON

O—h !

[Covers her face with her hands and turns away. The

SOLDIERS withdraw, bearing away the body of JAMES.

MARGERV approaches her.]

MARGERY

Kneel with me, dear, and pray to One who will
Forgive us all, James, Surrey, you, and me—
The Almighty Pardoners.

LADY HERON

Hence with such vain comfort !
And I am in no mood to be forgiven !
Where is his sword, that I may die on it ?
Gone with the wearer !
He said that he would slay me ! So he shall !
Take him my body ! Return gift for his !
I still have this, given me that night, that night !

[Seizes a dagger lying close at hand, and unsheathes it.

MARGERY rushes to the door, calling " Help ! Help ! "

SENESCHAL, DONALD, and SERVITORS rush in.]

LADY HERON

Help! Help! What use of help, when hope is
none?

Thus do I baffle help, and bid farewell

To life, love, everything!

[Stabs herself, and dies.]

THE END

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